

Julia Brownley *NEWS*

41st Assembly District



AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER TO THE 41ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(Including Agoura, Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Encino, Hidden Hills, Lake Sherwood, Malibu, Oak Park, Pacific Palisades, Port Hueneme, South Oxnard, Santa Monica, Tarzana, Topanga, Westlake Village and Woodland Hills)

MARCH 2008 – *Spring Edition*



The budget, the budget, and the budget.

Expect it to overlay much of what the Legislature is able to accomplish this year. It seemed grim enough when 2008 opened with a projected budget shortfall of \$14.5 billion. By February the projected deficit had spiraled up to \$16 billion.

The Governor kicks off the budget process. He takes the best revenue information available at the beginning of the year, and prepares his version of a balanced budget. He sends it to the Legislature to begin our review, and he is then done for a while.

The total state budget is in the neighborhood of \$140 billion – \$100 billion of General Fund dollars. The Governor's solution this year was truly Draconian. Lop 10% off virtually every state service and program, including schools, health care, parks and natural resources, support services to the blind/disabled/elderly/poor. Across the board, on an "all-programs-are-created-equal" basis, which of course they are not. Plus some accounting gimmicks.

This is not a budget that comports with my values or my reasons for coming to the Legislature, nor is it one that I will support.

Elizabeth Hill, who heads California's highly respected nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office, prepared her normal assessment of the Governor's budget proposal. And once she did her review in February, it was she who arrived at the even more dire \$16 billion projected shortfall.

Hill was not sparing in her criticism of the Governor's harsh cuts, saying that they reflected "little effort to prioritize and determine which state programs provide essential services or are most critical to California's future." And she took the rare step of putting out her own alternative budget proposal, including revenue enhancements, to assist the Legislature in the hard decisions ahead.

It's now in the hands of the Legislative budget committees. We began meeting last week to do the detailed line-by-line review of both the Governor's proposal and the LAO's alternative suggestions.

How did we find ourselves in this situation?

California has both a budget problem and a governance problem.

On the budget side, we are over-reliant on often wildly fluctuating personal and corporate income tax revenues, while state programs and services are ongoing and very difficult to cut suddenly or shut down temporarily during the downswings. We need a far more balanced approach to budgeting that looks longer term at stabilizing our revenues for more predictability in planning.

On the governance side, California is one of only three states that require a supermajority 2/3 vote of the Legislature to approve a budget or to pass revenue measures. This creates a structural "tyranny of the minority" because six Republicans in the 80-member Assembly have to vote for the budget to get to the 54 votes needed to reach 2/3, even if every one of the 48 Democrats approve it. California's budget process has been held up well past the constitutional deadline for years because of this need to negotiate a settlement with a handful of legislators.

Assembly Democrats just tried to close the tax loophole that exempts wealthy Californians who purchase yachts and private airplanes from paying sales tax if they simply keep them

out of state for a few weeks. Closing that loophole was loudly denounced as an anti-business "tax increase" by my Republican colleagues and failed to reach 2/3.

California is alone in the nation in exempting oil companies (who are reporting massive profits) from paying a "severance" fee for oil they extract from this state. Our attempt was simply to bring them in line with what they are paying in every other oil producing state. The bill did not get a single Republican vote and failed to reach 2/3. Meanwhile, back at home, school districts were preparing layoff notices to thousands of teachers as a result of the billions of dollars in budget cuts the Governor says they must absorb.

How will California's children compete in an increasingly global economy that demands highly educated and skilled workers? How can we tolerate closing neighborhood schools? Will we stand by and watch teachers walk out of their classrooms for the last time to start looking for other lines of work? By what moral justification do we put our children in the fiscal line of fire?

There are not that many options:

- We can make savage cuts like the Governor did, but risk doing serious long-term harm to the state.
- We can identify tax loopholes that can and should be closed, but will hit the 2/3 vote roadblock.
- We can do more borrowing, but California is almost at our borrowing capacity from prior budgets that just pushed off the hard decisions. Hefty debt service from past borrowing is one of the fastest growing parts of the budget expenditures.

None of the options are simple or desirable. I am particularly concerned about the severe risk to our educational system.

- We are a shameful 46th in the nation in per pupil spending.
- California spends almost \$2,000 less per student than the national average. \$5,100 less per student than New Jersey.
- Education Week, in its annual report, gave California a D+ on school funding.

In spite of this, the Governor's plan is to cut \$800 in per student spending. The impact of his proposed cuts would be devastating to K-12 students:

- Laying off 107,000 teachers?
- Closing all schools nearly a month early?
- Increasing classroom size by 35%?
- Laying off 137,000 education support professionals?
- Cutting more than \$24,000 per classroom?

But, the negative impact reaches beyond K-12. The CSU Chancellor moved up the application deadline to decrease the number of incoming students. Both the UC and CSU systems are considering fee increases. And the community college system fears 52,000 students will be denied spots because of budgetary constraints. This is utter madness and would be a devastating blow to California's future. Does the Governor not understand the critical nexus between a quality educational system and the future growth and sustainability of California's economy?

I will fight as hard as I am able, including as Chair of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance, to make sure that the decisions we will have to make in the upcoming months protect our children and our schools.

I will also try to ensure that the inevitable other impacts of a budget year like this one don't disproportionately hit the most vulnerable people in our state. But it isn't going to be easy. We must insist that the state look at every one of the special interest tax loopholes that have accumulated over decades, and at every reasonable revenue solution that does not impact middle class folks in order to ensure a fair and equitable balancing of the budget for the long term.

We are at a very serious crossroad in California. If we do not act with vision, diligence and common sense, and in a bipartisan way, the future of California's global position in the world marketplace may be seriously and irreparably damaged.

DEMOCRATS WEEKLY RADIO ADDRESS

March 8, 2008

"Hello. This is Assemblymember Julia Brownley, chair of the Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance.

Today's global economy provides many opportunities, but it also means our children are competing for jobs with countries like China and India, which long ago made education their top priority.

Parents understand that education is critical to future generations of Californians and don't want shortsightedness in Sacramento to hold their children back. For this reason, California voters overwhelmingly support Proposition 98, a ballot measure that was designed to protect vital funding for schools and teachers....

Over the next few months, Assembly Democrats will hold town halls across the state to discuss the budget's impact on education and other spending priorities, and we encourage all Californians to join us in a conversation about what your priorities are this tight fiscal year....

According to the California Dropout Research Project, unemployment, incarceration, and other factors associated with high school dropouts cost the state over \$40 billion annually. And although millions of students are learning the skills that will make their communities stronger, we continue to let 120,000 drop out of high school every year. We have world-class universities that have brought world-class jobs to California, but too many of our children will never step foot inside one.

If our children want to work in our state's thriving technology or finance sectors some day, let's make sure they get there. If they dream about the promise of equality for their communities, let's help them realize that vision.

California remains a worldwide beacon of innovation and equality and we have our teachers to thank for it. Let's help teachers give future generations of Californians the same opportunities they gave us.

This has been Assemblymember Julia Brownley, chair of the Budget Subcommittee on Education. Thank you for listening."

2008 Legislative Packet Introduced

I have 23 active bills going this year. Legislative sessions are two years long. Some of my bills have been carried over from 2007, and others are newly introduced in this second year of the 2007-08 session. Below are just a few.

EDUCATION BILLS

AB 2159 – Education Finance

Establishes the *Commission for Funding with Accountability, Transparency, and Simplicity* to come up with a plan for comprehensive reform of California's education financing and delivery system no later than July 1, 2010.

AB 2467 – Transfer of Preschool Information

Creates and funds six pilot programs to develop and demonstrate methods for preschool information transfer to public schools, and to report to the Legislature by March 1, 2011 on the results and possible implementation statewide.

AB 2468 – Instructional Materials

Provides more textbook options for teachers, at lower costs to the school districts, by opening up the purchase process and allowing school districts to purchase unbundled instructional materials.

AB 2469 – Higher Education Reporting

Convenes a work group – including the Legislative Analyst, Department of Finance, UC, CSU and community colleges – to create new reporting requirements that are more relevant to the Legislature's needs in making budget decisions.

ENVIRONMENTAL BILLS

AB 1391 – E-waste Recycling

Reduces the number of unwanted computers, cell phones, televisions and other e-waste that ends up in landfills, by requiring retailers to provide consumers with recycling information at the point of sale, including how and where to return, recycle and properly dispose of specified e-waste items.

AB 2195 – Rail Transit

Addresses a burdensome application process for the planning and construction of much-needed new light-rail grade crossings that has hampered efforts by transit agencies to expand light-rail systems, and thereby ease traffic congestion and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

AB 2505 – Ban on PVC in Retail Packaging

PVC production involves known carcinogens, and PVC packaging has been found to have high incidences of lead and other heavy metal contamination, posing serious health risks. Bill phases out PVC packaging in California over two years.

AB 2656 – Marine Debris and Bottle Caps

Prohibits retailers after January 1, 2010, from selling single-use plastic bottles with caps that are not affixed to or part of the container itself. The majority of all marine debris is plastic, and kills millions of seabirds and hundreds of thousands of marine mammals every year, including by mistaking bottle caps for food.

AB 2901 – Lead in Jewelry and Toxics in Packaging

Children's metal jewelry can contain high levels of lead, which is associated with behavioral problems, learning disabilities, hearing problems and growth retardation. Bill provides more consumer protections through inspections and penalties for manufacturers.

Other of my bills address human trafficking, election reform, itinerant veterans vendors, and foster youth. For more information on any of my bills, go to my website at Assemblymember.brownley@assembly.ca.gov, and click on the Legislation link.

OXNARD SCHOOL SHOOTING RESULTS IN TRAGEDY

The death of any child is a profound loss. On Tuesday morning, February 12, Larry King, an eighth grade student in my district, was shot in the head by a classmate while sitting quietly in his classroom at E.O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard. Larry suffered a massive stroke from the gunshot wound and died two days later. His family made his organs available for donation.

The tragedies of this event abound. Larry's life had not been an easy one. He was a 15-year-old foster child, who had recently moved to a residential facility for troubled and abused children, but he was recovering and making progress.

He was struggling with his gender identification and endured serious harassment and bullying because of it. Yet Larry loved to sing, and was studying "The Star Spangled Banner" in the hope of singing it at his younger brother's baseball games. He had the same dreams and plans to make a bright future for himself that we want every child in our state and in our country to have and to pursue.

The grief of Larry's family and friends is beyond imagining.

The shooter, who just turned 14 years old in January, faces first-degree murder charges and will likely be charged as an adult. His life will never be the same.

The students at E.O. Green are reeling and struggling to absorb the reality of such a tragedy.

Let us not allow the young and hopeful Larry King to die in vain. It was hatred and bigotry that pulled the trigger of the gun. Let us remember Larry as a young man who believed it was his protected right to pursue and to discover his own identity. Unfortunately, laws alone cannot protect human life from discrimination, and laws alone cannot make our schools and communities safe and bias free.

Each and every leader of our state, each and every teacher and principal, each and every community leader, and each and every parent and adult must steadfastly commit and recommit to the most important ideals that must be taught and learned in our schools and in our society. That is, the daily reinforcements of acceptance and tolerance of the human beings with whom we share our lives every day, each of whom is unique.



2008 Assembly "Woman of the Year"

Every year each member of the Assembly and of the Senate has the opportunity to honor an outstanding woman in his or her district for a very special recognition. I was privileged to name Woodland Hills resident, Agi Kessler, as my 2008 *Woman of the Year*.

Agi is Chair of the Democratic Party of San Fernando Valley. She has a deep loyalty to

Democratic values, and works tirelessly advocating for those ideals and getting like-minded people elected. Along with her husband, Kess, Agi has a strong commitment to encouraging growth of the Democratic Party. Her enthusiasm, dedication and incredible organizing skills serve as inspiration for hundreds of volunteers and elected officials.

The awards ceremony took place in our beautiful State Capitol on Monday morning, March 10, beginning with breakfast with Lt. Governor John Garamendi. Each honoree was then escorted by her Assemblymember down the center aisle of the State's Assembly Chamber, and presented by Assembly Speaker-Elect Karen Bass with an elegant framed certificate of recognition.

Around the District

No-Cost Volunteer Tax Assistance Available

With the April 15 income tax filing deadline coming up, taxpayers should be aware of the California Franchise Tax Board's "Volunteer Income Tax Assistance" (VITA) and "Tax Counseling for the Elderly" (TCE) programs. Both help individuals complete their income tax forms, at no cost. Here are three VITA/TCE locations in or near the 41st Assembly District.

Agoura Hills:

Agoura Hills Senior Center
30610 Thousand Oaks Blvd.

Call (818) 597-7361
for appointment.

Oxnard:

El Concilio del Condado
de Ventura
301 South "C" Street

Thursdays 5-8 p.m. through April
10. No appointment needed.

Santa Monica:

Wise Senior Services
1527 Fourth Street

Call (310) 394-9871
for appointment.

To find other locations convenient to you, go to www.ftb.ca.gov/individuals/vita, and click on "Volunteer Assistance Site Listings."

Expo Phase 2 Project Community Workshops

This is a much-needed light-rail project that will ultimately carry Westside passengers from downtown Los Angeles to the beach. Phase 1 from L.A. to Culver City is underway. Phase 2 is the planned connection to Santa Monica.

Three "open house" public workshops have been scheduled to provide information and receive community input on proposed grade crossings, station and parking locations, bike routes, and more.

Wednesday, March 26
6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Webster Middle School
"Daniels Den"
11330 W. Graham Place
Los Angeles

Tuesday, April 1
6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Crossroads School
Roth Hall
1714 21st Street
Santa Monica

Thursday, April 3
6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Vista Del Mar Child and
Family Services Gym
3200 Motor Avenue
Los Angeles

Assembly Selects Its Next Speaker

With term limits come changes in leadership in the Legislature. As Speaker Fabian Nuñez winds down his final year in the Assembly, our next Speaker, Assemblymember Karen Bass, has been unanimously approved as Speaker-Elect.



I could not be more pleased. Karen has been a part of the leadership team since she was elected in 2004, and will also be making some history as California's first Democratic African-American woman Speaker. She is widely respected among her colleagues as warm, friendly, smart, tough when needed, and honorable.

With Darrell Steinberg the incoming President of the State Senate, leadership of the two houses will be united and strong. I am honored and very much looking forward to working with such a wonderful team.

New Select Committee on Higher Education

I am excited to have been appointed by Speaker Nuñez to Chair the newly-formed Assembly Select Committee on Higher Education in the 21st Century. I was very pleased that the Speaker recognized the need for this committee and that the future of higher education in California warrants extra attention. It is my intent to have the committee explore budget transparency and the State's role and responsibility for oversight.

The committee will focus on the University of California and California State University systems budgets, student fees, enrollment projections, financial aid, long range planning and more. It will also look at public/private research projects, K-12 partnerships, career tech and graduation rates, among other issues.

In 2011, the compacts negotiated between the university systems and the Governor will expire. This new committee should provide important information for the Legislature to ensure that we're prepared for 2012.

Committee and Legislative Appointments

**Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #2 on Education
Chair, Select Committee on Higher Education in the 21st Century**

**Aging and Long-Term Care
Budget**

**Budget Subcommittee #3 on Resources
Education**

Natural Resources

Joint Legislative Budget Committee

Select Committee on Community Colleges

Select Committee on Domestic Violence

Select Committee on State School Financial Takeovers

Legislative Liaison, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission

Legislative Participant, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy

California Commission on the Status of Women

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